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Liberal: Not a Tempestuous Ideology

Apparently it’s a dirty word. One that hisses and scorns all tempestuous feelings in life, with a come-hither air. However, this word is simply defined as an individual that creates and thinks freely without society’s contribution of tact. The word is liberal. And contrary to most people’s definition of the word, the term liberal simply means, “a free-thinking individual”. It really has nothing to do with political standpoints, or radical ways, but it’s simply an alternative form of philosophy.

The word, “liberal” according to dictionary.com is defined as, “favorable to progress or reform, as in political or religious affairs.” However, I believe this definition to be too narrow and constrictive. Society today may actually relate the term to more political affairs as the definition states, but really the foundation upon which it was created, has a slightly different interpretation. Liberal is derived from the Latin word, *liber*, meaning free, not slave, and that meaning has followed through much of history up until a heavy political reign came in the United States and in England. John Stuart Mill advocated something that is referred to as, “Cultural Liberalism”, where the restrictions upon personal freedoms are eradicated. Even Locke’s own interpretation resembles, the “free-thinking individual” idea. He believed that the vital pieces of living are to be without limitation, and in his thinking, he essentially became one of the original Liberals. Though Locke’s image is slightly more primitive than today’s concept, he indeed founded the ideology of free-thinkers, without all the other complicated political rhetoric.

“Oh you liberals with your fanatical ideas”, is what always seems to come out of my mother’s conservative mouth. However does she not realize what exactly the true meaning behind the word is, and never does she think it simply means, “a free-thinking individual”, but rather some sort of anarchist government resisting form or organization of any kind—and though what she claims seems to bother my thoughts, I usually retort back with, "You might as well not vote, because you’ll inevitably vote straight republican, and well, I’ll just cancel out every single one of yours when I vote straight democrat,” and with her signature, “hmmph” she strolls with her nose in the WASP-y air. But why does the term get her conservative neo-realist panties in a twist? When in all reality a liberal is just another form of thinking. I do often wonder if she’d ever duke it out with John Stuart Mill and his own free will had she been given the chance or possibly tell off John Locke too. But not only does the word liberal mean an individual that thinks freely, but to her it also stands next to its brethren of Marxism, a highly poisonous way of life.

Today the word, liberal is still used frequently. For example, numerous colleges are considered, “Liberal Arts Colleges”, even in today’s standards, and yet these universities are not under a Puritanical regime, despite the term, “liberal” in its establishment. These types of colleges are characterized by an education with an emphasis on general knowledge and developing that knowledge into general intellectual capacities. Here the word is used the same as the, “free-thinking” individual definition. Students that study under this sort of curriculum are encouraged to think outside of the box, regardless of other input, whether that is society or other people. I myself, being a student of this type of academia can suffice for adequate evidence to help encourage the idea of “free-thinkers”. Just because this college is described as liberal arts, shouldn’t discourage others from its intent. Collectively, professors and students facilitate a conductive environment of intellectual freedom, rather than a political reign of fanatical attempts, as some may speculate.

Agreeing upon this definition of the term will not actually lead to doom. It’s just a broadening of its constrictive belt that has been tightening with much angst and fire, as political reigns become more and more prevalent—especially at this point in time with an election coming next year. If people were indeed more “liberal”, I think we could actually determine and accept its meaning, as we all thought more freely— however ironic *that* is. And hopefully most will see that “liberal” is not a tempestuous ideology, but something different that doesn’t include false anarchy references.